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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000552

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE HOLDS SUCCESSFUL PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF

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Classified By: CDA Elizabeth Pratt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Sierra Leone successfully held the second-round Presidential run-off election on September 8, thanks in large part to the professional and impartial conduct of the Sierra Leone security services and National Election Commission (NEC). Though observers reported isolated incidents of intimidation and malfeasance, observers do not expect the incidents to alter the final outcome of the vote. International observers commented on how impressed they were with improvements in the process from August 11. While Freetown has returned to normal, anxiety and tensions will likely rise as NEC methodically reviews the count and the political parties grow impatient. END SUMMARY.

SLOW, CONSISTENT VOTER TURNOUT

[1](#)2. (SBU) Most polling stations received their ballot materials prior to the scheduled opening at 7:00 a.m., and were able to open on time. As with the first round vote, there were a few late openings, but most stations opened on time. Reflective of the high tensions leading-up to the vote, rumors--such as stories that some stations were given invisible instead of indelible ink--spread quickly via radio and cell phone across the country. NEC officials addressed the rumors and concerns quickly and openly which helped to ease tension. Though many stations reported some malfunctioning equipment (i.e. hole-punchers or scissors) or missing privacy screens, these problems appeared to have little impact on the overall process as NEC officials improvised appropriate solutions. In contrast to August 11 (see reftel 1), voter turnout was low in the morning, but remained steady and consistent throughout the day. The ECOWAS observer mission estimated a 60 to 65 percent voter turnout, compared to the 75 percent turnout in the first round. Throughout the day, traffic in Freetown and surrounding areas was especially light, although, unlike August 11, there was market activity. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and military police were highly visible and deployed to most of the polling stations observed by Embassy monitors and were stationed to strategic points around town.

POLICE REACT TO IRREGULARITIES AND INTIMIDATION

13. (SBU) Local and international observers reported more incidents of voting irregularities and acts of intimidation or malfeasance than during the August 11 vote. However, in most of the cases reported, the police and security forces responded to the reports promptly and impartially, thus protecting the overall integrity of the process. In rare instances the lack of police presence contributed to violent crowd reactions to the alleged presence of ex-combatants being brought to the polling stations by defeated parliamentarian candidates. An Embassy observer in Kono reported that a defeated Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) parliamentary candidate arrived with an entourage in a vehicle with Guinean license plates. The entourage began intimidating voters and threatening violence. However, the local SLP responded and calmed the situation. According to several press reports, police in Freetown arrested eight individuals for carrying knives, bags of rocks, and other such weapons. The RSO confirmed one such report in which the SLP stop a car carrying several individuals with SLPP propaganda and bags full of large stones.

14. (U) Other irregularities included reports that in some stations 100 percent of the voters had cast ballots by mid-day. The Independent Radio Network, which has been announcing unofficial results from posted tally sheets commented that in several stations no votes for one of the two candidates were reported, despite the presences of APC and SLPP party agents.

CANDIDATES CONTINUE TO COMPLAIN

14. (SBU) In the wake of election day, both candidates continue to complain publicly about perceived injustices in

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the electoral process. Though Embassy and other observers reported the presence of APC party agents at polling centers across Kailahun, APC spokesperson Alpha Kanu and other continue to refer to the district as a &no go8 area for the APC. Similarly, SLPP candidate Berewa stated that he was &devastated8 by the abuse of SLPP supporters by the police on election day. Both candidates have equivocated when asked whether they will accept the results of the run-off, though the press have quoted Koroma as saying he would accept &the outcome of a credible election.8

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC OBSERVER REACTION

15. (SBU) The second round vote attracted more international domestic observers than the first round. According to NEC statistics, 447 international and 8980 domestic observers were accredited for both rounds of the election. In the preliminary statements of international and local observers, while deferring judgment on the final outcome, have characterized the voting process so far as adequately peaceful and free of intimidation. Many statements noted that NEC addressed many of the lessons learned from the August 11 vote, resulting in a smoother process and fewer invalid ballots. The 64-person ECOWAS observer mission commended the NEC for organizing the run-off in &an even more efficient, transparent and credible manner8 than the first round of voting. In its preliminary finding, ECOWAS noted intense national divisions during the run-off campaign and encouraged all political parties to implement measures to transform themselves into truly national parties. The EU Election Observation Mission and the National Democratic Institute urged the political parties to refer their grievances to NEC for investigation to maintain the peace and tranquility. The NDI observer team also commended the "high-level of professionalism" exhibited by the NEC polling staff. All encouraged political parties, voters and the government to continue to adhere to the constitutional elections process and to address all challenges and

complaints to the NEC to ensure appropriate and transparent investigation.

LOGISITICAL ASSISTANCE FROM ECOWAS DEPOT

16. (U) As with the August 11 round, vehicles and drivers from the USG-funded, PAE-run ECOWAS Depot located in Freetown were critical to ensuring that electoral materials were transported throughout the country. The NEC will continue to use these assets through September 16 to bring the ballots and other electoral equipment back to Freetown. The UN electoral experts who were assisting the NEC were extremely appreciative of the continued support and praised the vehicles and drivers as the most reliable and professional in carrying out their duties.

COMMENT

17. (C) According to the constitution and the electoral code, NEC has two weeks to certify the results. As experienced following the first round of voting (reftel G), tensions may rise as the country awaits final certification from NEC. Thus far, neither political party has claimed victory and both candidates have publicly stated that only NEC can certify the results. In the meantime, however, radios across Sierra Leone are tuned to stations broadcasting round-the-clock tallies of the unofficial posted results from individual polling centers across the country. Most listeners are likely doing the math and presuming that the results indicate an APC victory. However, since these early results have come mainly from the APC strongholds, the picture is far from clear.
PRATT